

From previous experience of Common Crane (*Grus grus*) I judged that this bird was considerably larger. It was also more heavily

built, larger bodied and with noticeably thick legs and thighs.

Generally very tame for a bird of its size.

51, HALSBURY ROAD,
WESTBURY PARK,
BRISTOL, BS6 7ST,
ENGLAND,
November 4, 1978.

JOHN ROSSETTI

9. UNEXPECTED OCCURRENCE OF THE GOLDENBACKED
WOODPECKER *DINOPIUM BENGHALENSE* (LINNAEUS)
IN KUTCH

On 17th September, 1978 I met with a bird in Vijaya Vilas Plantation (about 8 km. west of Mandvi) which I would least expect to see in Kutch. This was the Goldenbacked Woodpecker. How this bird reached Vijaya Vilas is, at least for me, a mystery and an occurrence which defies any logical explanation. It is a bird that does not migrate, even locally, to distant places as it is not capable of sustained flight over long distances. It can neither fly over the Gulf of Kutch nor over the Little Rann of Kutch adjoining Saurashtra; I am therefore inclined to rule out the possibility of its entering Kutch from there.

Within the last century this woodpecker has not been met with in Kutch, but is listed on page 171 of the BIRDS OF KUTCH (Ali). According to the BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA (Dharmakumarsinhji) the Goldenbacked Woodpecker is found in and around the Gir Forest and Girnar where it is resident. Shri Shivraj-kumar Khachar informs me that he has seen it at Hingolgadh (Jasdan). The HANDBOOK (Ali & Ripley) says that the Sind race—*dilutum*—occurs in Baluchistan, Sind and the NW

districts of Pakistan; and on this side of the border, in Mt. Abu and parts of west Rajasthan. I have seen it in Sirohi (Rajasthan) in 1968, and it has been recorded from Palanpur and further to the west of it up to Radhanpur taluka¹ which touches the Little Rann. It would be worthwhile if an ornithologist from Pakistan could throw some light on the extent of the present distribution of *Dinopium benghalense* in Sind.

The Kutch area has sprung a few surprises by way of unexpected bird occurrences, among these being the Eastern Whistling Swan, the Woodcock and the Haircrested Drongo; and we now have the Goldenbacked Woodpecker! There are only three ways by which this woodpecker could have landed in Kutch: It may have come flying along in stages from SSW Sind into NW Kutch (Lakhpat Taluka), or the other possible route is from the Banas Kantha District (Radhanpur) of Gujarat into Rapar Taluka of Kutch. However on this route too it would have had to cover considerable distances over the arid portions on both sides of the Rann, plus a narrow strip of the Rann itself. And the third possibility could be that the bird got swept across to

¹ The Birds of Gujarat, *JBNS* 52: 450, 1954.

this side in a cyclonic storm which blew over

the eastern portions of Kutch from the ENE direction about three years ago.

JUBILEE GROUND,
BHUJ, KUTCH,
December 12, 1978.

M. K. HIMMATSINHJI

10. FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF THE WHITECAPPED RIVER CHAT *CHAIMARRORNIS LEUCOCEPHALA*

This note is based upon observations of a river chat nest at 13,300 feet in the Nanda Devi Sanctuary area of the Garhwal Himalaya, Uttar Pradesh, India. The nest was observed for a period of five days in early August 1977, notes being made of parental behaviour, food items brought, and reactions to any 'strangers' within the territory.

The nest in question was 18 feet above water level in a river cliff cut by the North Rishi Ganga river. The pair's territory extended for 400 metres above, and for 200 metres below, the nest site. The site itself was a ledge, the nest being partially concealed by a veil of grass. The nest was the typical cup shape, made mainly of dry grasses. At the time of observation there were four newly hatched young in the nest.

The river chat is characteristically a very demonstrative bird, calling frequently and usually bobbing and dipping, or 'pumping', as it does so. The pair observed were strongly territorial. Territorial disputes between this pair and another further up the valley took place most mornings as well as on the main days of observation. The closely related redstarts *Phoenicurus* sp. were usually left well alone. Only on one occasion was a male Bluefronted

Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* chased out of the territory, despite being 300 metres from the nest at the time.

The male and female were not readily distinguishable by plumage, but could be differentiated on the basis of their behaviour, as in the European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* (Lack 1965).¹ The male was the more vociferous of the two birds, calling and singing far more frequently than the female. Any activity in the male was a slow and noisy process, unlike the quicker and less vocal female. The pair were not caught so that it was not possible to definitely assert the correctness of the labelling. Both were distinguished from the juveniles of the year which had a light grey, ill-defined, chest in contrast to the black and sharply defined chest of the adults. Any juveniles coming into the territory were quickly chased out.

Day One. Food items: These were mainly caterpillars or grubs, usually brought one at a time. There was an average of 7-8 minutes between visits by each parent.

The male foraged upstream over a wider area than the female which confined foraging to the sides of the gorge, with occasional visits onto the flats above. The male and female tended to feed synchronously, arriving within 15 seconds of each other. On approach both called, the male frequently on both arrival

¹ LACK, D. (1965): The Life of the Robin. London.